

Faithful, Like My Father

Intro. This morning I want to talk about a foundational attribute or quality found perfectly in God and not so perfectly but admirably in fathers. It's the quality of faithfulness. According to one source, ***faithfulness** is remaining loyal to someone or something and putting that loyalty into consistent practice regardless of extenuating circumstances. It's steady devotion to a person, a thing or a belief.* One popular Christian speaker says, "*Faithfulness is not doing something right once but doing something right over and over and over and over.*" **Faithfulness** is the glue that holds things together. It holds marriages / families / churches / businesses / governments / and nations together. But without faithfulness things come apart. A prophecy describing Israel's coming Messiah, says, **Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. - Isa. 11:5.** Just as a belt and sash hold other parts of a wardrobe in place, righteousness and faithfulness will be the cohesiveness of Christ's kingdom. The disintegration we see in society today is in part the result of a lack of faithfulness at every level...but particularly faithfulness to God. God is no longer the center...the One in whom we trust. In His **faithfulness** our souls find peace and security. Yet most people are not devoted to the Lord in any meaningful way. We feel like David who prayed, **Help, LORD, for the godly are no more; the faithful have vanished from among men. - Psa. 12:1**

So today as we honor and celebrate our earthly fathers, I want to begin by reminding you of the absolute faithfulness of our Heavenly Father. His faithfulness is the pattern and the example for every earthly father. So consider with me...

1. Our Heavenly Father's Perfect and Unfailing Faithfulness

One of the earliest proclamations of God's faithfulness was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. It's recorded in **Ex. 34** where Moses was given a fresh vision of God's glory. In the previous chapter the Lord promised to tell Moses **His name** which reveals His character and what is true about Him. So in **Ex. 34:6** we read, **And He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."** Notice that last clause. God told Moses His love and faithfulness abound like a river at flood stage...a river that overflows its banks. This means the sheer volume of divine love and faithfulness is so great it exceeds whatever tries to limit or contain it.

Notice that each divine attribute is personal and relational. God is **compassionate / gracious / slow to anger / abounding in love and faithfulness.** These qualities describe the permanent disposition our Heavenly Father has toward us. Because God is entirely faithful, we're encouraged to trust Him with all of our needs and in all of our troubles. A faithful God is constant, changeless, and reliable. Human faithfulness tends to waver and wear down, but it isn't that way with God. He can never be **less compassionate, less gracious** or **less faithful.** His character today is exactly what it was when He revealed Himself to Moses. Not even our doubts and unbelief can alter what is forever true about Him. **Psa. 146:6 - the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them-- the LORD, who remains faithful forever.**

Even though the Lord had demonstrated His faithfulness time and time again, Israel was forgetful and needed repeated reminders. The same is true for us. Our faith is always being tested by life's circumstances. Some credit a cleaning lady as the first to say, "*The trouble with life is that it's so daily.*" With every challenging development, we need fresh reminders. Through some verse of Scripture or through the gentle encouragement of a friend, God whispers..."I'm faithful...trust Me."

After Israel experienced the Lord's deliverance and enjoyed His miraculous ability to meet their needs, Moses told the people..."**Know therefore that the Lord your God is God;**

He is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commands." - Deut. 7:9. Moses said, "**Know therefore...**" In other words, based on God's love and what you've already seen Him do for you...let this sink in. Like a stake driven in the ground...claim this about God and hold on to it. "**...the Lord your God is...the faithful God...**" So Moses repeated what God told him and what He had proven so many times.

The faithfulness of God the Father and God the Son is declared throughout the Bible:

- **Psa. 89:2 - I will declare that your love stands firm forever; that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself.**
- **Isa. 25:1 - O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things planned long ago."**
- **Lam. 3:22 - Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.**
- **I Cor. 1:9 - "God who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful."**
- **II Cor.1:18 - "But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "yes" and "no." For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No", but in him it has always been "Yes." For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through Him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God." In other words, when it comes to God's promises, there is no such thing as **maybe, perhaps, possibly, or hopefully so**. In Christ, the promises are a firm **Yes** and **Amen** which means, "*so be it*".**
- Finally, in **Rev.19:11**, where John is given a vision of the second coming of Christ, we read these words, "**And I saw heaven opened and, behold, a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True...**"

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible declares the faithfulness of our Heavenly Father. So count on it friend...God is faithful and He will always be faithful to you! And it's helpful to consider the original Hebrew words translated **faithful** and **faithfulness**. In their contemporary setting, these words were used to describe the *security or firmness of that which supports something else*. The words were used of **the arms of a nurse who carries an infant / they were used of a good foundation that supports a house / and they were used of a sturdy wall that holds a nail**. These word pictures help clarify what faithfulness is in ways that are familiar and concrete.

Consider the nurse who carries an infant. Men are sometimes accused of carrying a baby like a football or sack of potatoes. We put them on our shoulders / throw them up in the air / swing them around / and bounce them on our knee. It's no wonder kids are so mixed up! You won't see too many mother's doing that! A nurse or a mother safely cradles that precious package in her arms. She may drop a bag of groceries, a cell phone or her car keys...but she never drops her baby! In her arms her infant is safe and secure. Her grip is faithful. Now in fairness to men, a father's grip is faithful too, but he keeps everybody on edge. (And did you hear last week about the man who caught the baby dropped from the 10th floor of that burning apartment building in London? Give him a hand!) God holds us the way a nurse or our mothers did. Our lives are safe and secure because He is faithful. Not only is it impossible to fall from Christ's embrace, but no one can ever snatch us from Him.

In **Jn. 10:27-29** Jesus said, **My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.** Believers are held in the omnipotent double grip of God the Father and God the Son. That's absolute safety and security!

The home remodeling shows that are so popular remind us how important it is for a house to have a good foundation. Ask Chip and Joanna. There's no sagging or sinking when a foundation is strong. This is another way the Hebrew word translated faithfulness is used. Like a solid foundation, God is faithful. The life built on God won't crack, crumble, sink or wash out. Unlike those who build their lives on human philosophies and opinions, the life built on God is built on a solid Rock. **Deut. 32:4 - He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He.** Jesus amplified this in **Matt. 7:24.** He said, **...everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.**

And how about this...Would you trust a screw in ½" drywall to support a hammock? Would you hang a shelf of grandma's favorite knick-knacks on a nail driven into paneling? No, of course not! A nail in drywall can't support the weight...it's not trustworthy. But how many people hang their hopes and dreams on unreliable things...things that are temporary and untrustworthy? Like a nail driven into something solid, God is faithful. The Scriptures say those who trust in the Lord will never be disappointed. Their hammock will hold, their house won't sink and their knick-knacks won't come crashing down. The hope we have in Christ isn't wishful thinking...it's a confident expectation based on the God who is reliable. **Heb. 10:23 - Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.**

So God's faithfulness is like the arms of a nurse carrying an infant / its like a house supported by a good foundation / and its like a nail driven into a solid wall. Each word picture suggests *security and firmness*. God's faithfulness is so incredibly vast the Psalmist David compared it to the greatest thing his mind could conceive. In **Psa. 36:5** He said, **Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.** As a shepherd, David often camped beneath a starry sky. I hope you'll have a chance to escape the city lights this summer. In the blackness of night, look up and be filled with awe and wonder by what you see. No matter how far we look into outer space, we never see it all of it...there's still more. The same is true with respect to God's faithfulness. It's inexhaustible and beyond measure.

Every sinner who trusts Christ for salvation is privileged to enjoy God's faithfulness in a firsthand way. We sense the faithfulness of His presence and His work in our lives. We experience the blessings of answered prayer. We see God's hand in all of life's circumstances. We know that He is the One who leads and protects and graciously provides everything we need. At times the Lord even shows us special demonstrations of His wisdom, love and power. Like He did for Israel at the Red Sea He may open a way for us when every option is closed and impassable. But whether the Lord chooses to do this or not, we're never alone. He's always with us working everything together for good. We can count on that.

Ann Voskamp has written a provocative paragraph about God's faithfulness. (We've included it on the sermon notes.) *"I glance back in the mirror to the concrete bridge, the one I've boldly driven straight across without second thought, and I see truth reflecting back at me: Every time fear freezes and worry writhes, every time I surrender to stress, aren't I advertising the unreliability of God? That I really don't believe? But if I'm grateful to the Bridge Builder for the crossing of a million strong bridges, thankful for a million faithful moments, my life speaks my beliefs and I trust Him again."*

For the remaining few minutes, I want to transition to some thoughts about the faithfulness of our earthly fathers.

2. Our Earthly Father's Imperfect but Formative Faithfulness

Theologians divide God's attributes or characteristics into two categories...attributes that are communicable or transferable and attributes that incommunicable or not transferable. Incommunicable attributes are qualities found in God alone. They're exclusive to Him. For example, God is omnipotent or all powerful. He is never diminished or exhausted by the exercise of His power. Here's a FB post of my nephew Jared with an impressive body builder. (You have to be comfortable in your own skin to post a picture like this and Jared is all that!) This is one powerful fellow! But his strength and endurance doesn't even begin to approach omnipotence. His strength has limits, but God's power is unlimited. And God hasn't shared omnipotence with anybody other than Jesus. Can you imagine the chaos we'd cause if we were omnipotent? God is also omniscient...He knows everything. Knowledge of everything is something else God doesn't share with anybody. I heard a story last week that illustrates as young fathers we don't know everything. This fathering thing arrives new to us.

"One night a hillbilly's wife went into labor. He sent for the doctor. This couple lived so far back in the Arkansas woods, they didn't have electricity. (I think he was a neighbor of Jim Thompson.) As the doctor prepared for the delivery, he said to the hillbilly, "Here, hold this lantern for me, so I can see what I'm doing." Just about that time, a cute little baby girl was born. The doctor said to the excited husband, "Whoa! Don't be so fast with that lantern, I see another one coming." And sure enough, there came a little baby boy. Just as the hillbilly was about to put the lantern aside, the doctor once again sounded off, "Wait a minute, I see another one." Upon hearing that, the hillbilly replied, "Hey Doc, do you think it's the light that's attract'n 'em?" With no further comment, I'll just back away.

But other attributes in this incommunicable category include His omnipresence / sovereignty / transcendence / immutability / and self-existence. These attributes are exclusive to God making Him distinct from creation. Though the goal of a Christian is to be transformed to be Christ-like, we will never fully be like the Lord and in no sense will we ever become gods as the Mormons teach.

On the other hand, communicable attributes are divine qualities human beings can possess to a limited extent. For example, God is love and human beings are capable of loving. But, our love is never as perfect or pure as God's love. And God is just. Human beings have a sense of justice and we exercise justice. But once again, our justice is always imperfect. Faithfulness is an attribute in this category. It's communicable or transferable. By God's grace, faithfulness can be learned, practiced and developed. But once again, our faithfulness will always be flawed and imperfect. This is underscored by Dr. Jayce O'Neal who writes, *"No person is 100% faithful. It is only when we see the depth of our own unfaithfulness that we can truly begin to understand the faithfulness of Jesus. He is faithful even when we are not. Thankfully, we have a perfect God who loves us imperfect people."* Each of us here this AM can be sure about this...God wants to produce faithfulness in our lives. **Gal. 5:22** lists faithfulness as a fruit of His Holy Spirit.

Now with your permission, (or without it) I want to talk about my father. Over the years I don't think I've overused personal examples. Though he was an extraordinary guy, my purpose isn't to glorify my father, but to glorify God's work of grace in his life. And perhaps what I say will remind you of some reasons to honor your own father today. One of my Dad's most admirable qualities was faithfulness on so many levels. And let me say this up front...as a character trait, faithfulness has nothing to do with education / earning potential / aptitude / or pedigree. My father wasn't overly blessed in those ways. So let me tell you how that faithfulness showed up in my father's life.

My first thought is the way he was so completely faithful to my mother. His faithfulness was apparent in the tender way he spoke to her and about her / by the affection he showed her / and by the way he related to other women. In my pre-teen years, my dad was employed as a route salesman for a laundry. Sometimes he took me to work with him. Though I was too young to know the facts of life, I remember that he wouldn't enter the home of certain clients. He didn't go into detail, but explained that he loved my mother too much to allow any suspicion or appearance of evil.

My dad was also a faithful family man who invested himself in the lives of his children. He was always approachable / interested / and supportive of whatever we were doing. A year never passed without a family vacation / trips to the beach / and other special family events. He was all about his wife and kids. Often during supper, we'd hear a knock at the door. Standing at the door would be a small crowd of neighbor kids asking if Mel could come out to organize a touch football or softball game. There must have been times when he said, "No, I can't tonight" but I can't remember a single instance. My parents gave up the thought of ever having grass on our side lawn...our gridiron.

Despite his commitment to those living under his roof, I took note of how faithfully he cared for his widowed mother. He helped Grandma Stewart financially and by cutting her lawn and making doing chores around her home she was unable to do herself.

Having enlisted in the Navy right out of High School, my father didn't go to college. In fact, I'm not sure he finished high school. He made up for his limited education with hard work and faithfulness to his employer and his employer's customers. For years my father left for work before the family was awake and he and rarely got home before 4:30. I often wondered how he could do such mindless work day after day and then paint a house on Saturday. My parents lived paycheck to paycheck but my father was always a faithful provider. We didn't always have everything we wanted, but our needs were always met.

I could go on and on boasting about my father's faithfulness. But on this day when we honor fathers, the most significant display of faithfulness was his loyalty and devotion to Jesus. This was remarkable because he wasn't raised in a Christian home and was newly saved around the time when he and my mother married. Like each of us who trust Jesus, his life was a work in progress. He didn't get everything right all the time, but as he remained faithful to the Lord, he grew and matured. In our home, God was respected and Sunday worship was a priority he gently enforced. Family devotions were hit and miss despite desire and many sincere attempts at consistency, but my father used every situation as a teachable moment. My parents were never mistaken for Ozzie and Harriet, but our family was held together by my father's love and faithfulness.

He often quoted two verses that I suppose could be called his life verses. The first was the verse God used to bring Him to Christ for salvation. **Mk. 8:36 - What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?** The second is a verse he leaned on more and more throughout his life. In **Jer. 33:3** the Lord said, '**Call to Me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.**' As I grew in the Lord myself I came to realize that my dad was faithful because His heavenly Father is faithful. His faithfulness developed out of his fellowship with Jesus. We said this earlier, but faithfulness is a fruit of the Spirit...a quality God longs to produce in each of us children. Like two people who begin to look alike because they spend so much time together, my dad became more and more like His Heavenly Father. As one dictionary defines faithfulness, *he was strict or thorough in the performance of duty / he was true to his word, promises and vows / his life was full of loyalty and fidelity / and he was a man who could be relied on, trusted and believed.* That's how he lived out his life. I grew up wanting to be faithful like my father who had grown to be faithful like His Heavenly Father.

According to God's design, believing fathers are to be living examples of faithfulness to their children. A father's example is imperfect, but powerfully formative. It's natural and normal for children to emulate their parents and for a boy to want to be like his father. All during our growing up years, we watch them and make mental notes. And it's so much easier for children to believe in God and trust His faithfulness when their father has modeled faithfulness in their home. That's what my father did. He told us many things but nothing had greater impact than the example he showed us. **Isa. 38:19** says believing fathers will praise the Lord for His faithfulness and tell their children about it. It says, **The living, the living--they praise you, as I am doing today; fathers tell their children about your faithfulness.** That's what my father did for his children.

Now I told you a silly story about a young father. Let me finish with one that's more serious.

A little boy was eagerly looking forward to the birthday party of a friend who lived only a few blocks away. When the day finally arrived, a blizzard made the sidewalks and roads nearly impassable. Sensing the danger, the boy's father was hesitant to let him go. The boy reacted tearfully. "But Dad," he pleaded, "all the other kids will be there...their parents are letting them go." The father thought for a moment then softly replied, "All right, you can go." Surprised but overjoyed, the boy bundled up and plunged into the raging storm. The wind driven snow made visibility almost impossible. It took the boy more than half an hour to trudge through the drifts and walk the short distance to the party. As the boy rang the doorbell, he turned for a moment to look out at the storm. His eye caught the shadow of a retreating figure. It was his father. His father had followed his son's every step to make sure he arrived safely.

That story is such an awesome illustration of the faithful way God watches over His sons and daughters. And the most significant way my father's faithfulness showed up was like the father in this story. His deepest desire was for each of his children to experience the saving grace of Jesus Christ. He prayed for us and did everything he could do to be sure we each make it home safely. And the home he wanted us to safely reach is heaven. My brother Craig was saved just after my father passed away about 6 years ago. Only eternity will tell how often my father faithfully prayed for each of us but especially for Craig and his need of salvation.

Our Heavenly Father's faithfulness is vast, perfect and unfailing. His faithfulness is the pattern and example. Though imperfect, the faithfulness we see in our earthly fathers is a reflection of God's faithfulness and evidence of His grace at work in them. Today I'd encourage you to do as I have done. Make a list of ways your dad has been faithful to you. Then go out and buy him something meaningful...like a fishing pole or some lures. (just kidding) On this day set aside to honor him, be sure to let him know how much you appreciate his faithfulness to you!